

**Testimony of Richard A. Boucher**  
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**Before the Senate Armed Services Committee**  
**February 14, 2008**

**“U.S. Policy in Afghanistan”**

Chairman Levin, Members of the Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to address you today on progress and strategy in carrying out U.S. policy toward Afghanistan. I am just back from a trip to Kabul and Kandahar and look forward to sharing my impressions.

Let me begin by posing two very fundamental thoughts about our involvement in Afghanistan: What is our objective and what strategy are we pursuing to get there?

After 9/11 the United States helped Afghan partners topple the Taliban regime and joined with international partners to ensure that Afghanistan would never again become a sanctuary for terrorists. We remain committed to the goal of building long-term stability based on Afghan national sovereignty, democratic principles, economic development, and respect for human rights. Afghanistan has achieved many successes in their fight against the Taliban and Al-Qaida – establishing infrastructure, securing territory, providing education, healthcare, and training, but we have not won yet. Our shared goal of stability requires a large commitment from us and our Allies, and will continue to require this for a considerable time.

When we speak of our commitment, we are speaking of an investment in the future. Afghanistan is not just a battle theater to fight enemies, but a place of strategic opportunity. Afghanistan represents an opportunity to have a close, democratic ally in the heart of a continent with unmatched political and economic capital and potential. Afghanistan has the potential of becoming the linchpin for regional integration in South and Central Asia. The past six years have showed us that it has the potential for transformation from a broken, failing state that harbored terrorists into a democratic, prosperous land bridge between the South and Central Asian regions – regions that were virtually disconnected until 2001. A free and

secure Afghanistan provides new opportunities for growth in trade and security, for the benefit of the region and the world.

Comparing Afghanistan to what it was under the Taliban regime just six and a half years ago, we have made serious progress on a broad range of fronts. Sustained successes on the battlefield have deprived the Taliban of their ability to move freely about the country and spread their extremist writ. Thanks to economic growth and strengthened local institutions, we are seeing support for the insurgency decline and support for the Afghan Government increase in most areas of Afghanistan. The recent visit of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to Kandahar, which was once the insurgent groups' home base, indicates the progress we have made and our continued commitment to support Afghanistan in completing its transition from tyranny to stability and a constitutional government.

At the same time we must recognize that important challenges remain. The recent reports by the Afghanistan Study Group and the Atlantic Council of the United States are accurate in their assessments that narcotics production and trade, widespread corruption, cross-border flow of insurgents from Pakistan, and lack of international donor coordination require our full attention. Many of the reports' recommendations for the way ahead are already being implemented: A resolute and comprehensive approach to counternarcotics; an economic and social development plan for Pakistan's border regions; diplomatic efforts to strengthen NATO's involvement in Afghanistan; and support for a United Nations Special Representative with a strong mandate.

## **SECURITY**

As Secretary Rice said during her trip to Afghanistan last week, our counterinsurgency efforts in Afghanistan "is having good effect, but the work is not complete." We have made considerable progress against the Taliban and other insurgents. U.S.-led NATO forces in the East have successfully linked security operations with governance and reconstruction initiatives in a full-spectrum counterinsurgency campaign. Afghan army, police, governors, tribal leaders and citizens are standing against the Taliban. In the South, Afghan and Allied forces have taken the fight to the Taliban, recently recapturing the restive district of Musa Qala in Helmand province and helping establish Afghan Government presence. We and our NATO and Afghan partners continue to work together to consolidate and extend those gains by bringing in governance and development.

Due to their inability to win on the battlefield, the Taliban have resorted to terrorist tactics such as improvised explosive devices, suicide bombs, kidnapping, and direct targeting of foreign civilians. The attack on the Serena Hotel in Kabul on January 14 is but the most recent example. Of course, these indirect tactics can be deadlier than open combat for our troops. We are also battling a cynical but effective Taliban communications strategy.

The United States, our Allies, and Afghan officials share the desire to see the Afghan Government assume greater responsibility for its own security. Our training and equipping programs for the Afghan National Security Forces are showing results: We have trained and equipped more than 49,400 Afghan National Army personnel. The Afghan National Army is now a respected institution amongst Afghans and is increasingly taking the lead in planning and executing operations.

We have a comprehensive program in place to develop the Afghan police and to increase policing capacity at the district level called the Focused District Development Plan. Through better training and leadership, improved pay and electronic distribution of salaries, and provision of better equipment, we are working to ensure that the police are ready and motivated to do their jobs. But it takes time to transform a system of militias loyal to local commanders and warlords to a professionally led force acting on behalf of the Government of Afghanistan that respects and enforces rule of law and human rights.

We are committed to NATO's mission and are increasing American support to the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force with more troops and resources. The United States will deploy an additional 3,200 Marines to Afghanistan this spring. 2,200 Marines will be deployed to Regional Command South. The remaining 1,000 Marines will train and develop Afghan National Security Forces.

Without doubt, success is possible but not assured. Therefore, the international community needs to continue and expand its efforts. The greatest threat to Afghanistan's future is abandonment by the international community. As Secretary Gates has made clear in testimony here and in other public comments, meeting the requirements identified by NATO commanders remains a challenge. The mission in Afghanistan needs more forces, equipment (such as helicopters), and trainers for the Afghan army and police. We have promised the Afghan people to assist in stabilizing their country and NATO needs to provide the personnel and the tools to make good on that promise. As we look to the upcoming NATO

Summit in Bucharest in April, we will continue to work with our 25 NATO Allies and other International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) partners in Afghanistan to meet the requirements needed to succeed in the NATO ISAF mission.

## **GOVERNANCE**

Lasting stability will only come when the Afghan government can step in to fill the void that is left when an area is cleared from insurgents. We must, therefore, focus on the less tangible but equally critical goal of extending the government's influence nationwide. In order to persuade Afghan citizens to side with their government against the insurgents, Afghans must see that their government has the ability to deliver basic services, provide the rule of law, uphold human rights, and extend economic opportunities effectively, transparently, and responsibly throughout the country. Our foreign assistance programs help achieve the objective of visible and viable Afghan governance at the local level. We are funding local projects developed by community and provincial councils that play an increasing role in responding to the people's needs. We are also helping the Ministry of Education create a network of public service academies and the Ministry of Justice to promote rule of law at the local level.

We support honest and competent governors that respond to the needs of the people and respect human rights. In this context, we welcome the establishment of the Independent Directorate for Local Governance that has already achieved encouraging results. We hope that this institution will continue to be instrumental in building public confidence in the Government of Afghanistan.

## **RECONSTRUCTION**

Reconstruction and development work remains on track in much of the country and the Afghan economy continues to grow at impressive rates, with licit Gross Domestic Product more than doubling since 2002. The lives of millions of Afghans have improved considerably: Up from eight percent of Afghans in 2001, more than 80 percent of the population now has access to medical care. Almost 11,000 medical professionals have been trained. More than 680 hospitals and clinics have been built and outfitted. For the first time in 10 years, the grain harvest was sufficient to meet consumption needs inside Afghanistan. In 2001, 900,000 children – almost exclusively boys – were enrolled in school. Now, there are more than five million and more than 1.5 million of these (34%) are girls and young women. Since 2001, there has been a 22 percent decline in mortality rates for infants and children under five years of age – we are saving 85,000 more young

lives every year. More than 70 percent of the population – including 7 million children – has been inoculated against the Polio virus. In 2001, there was a dysfunctional banking system. Now, Afghanistan has a functioning Central Bank with more than 30 regional branches and an internationally-traded currency. There are now 3 mobile telephone companies serving more than 3.5 million subscribers – this is almost 11 percent of the population. In 2001, there were 50 kilometers of paved roadway in the country, now there are more than 4000 kilometers of paved roads.

We plan to allocate close to \$600 million dollars of our Fiscal Year 2008 base foreign assistance budget to reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan, which will support programs ranging from education, health, agriculture, infrastructure, and the activities of Provincial Reconstruction Teams. In the Fiscal Year 2008 supplemental, we have also requested about \$500 million to build roads and power infrastructure and another \$50 million to expand our successful health and education programs. These initiatives are connecting the Afghan people to their government and are creating an environment in which they have the basic services and infrastructure necessary to prosper.

And we are not alone. Our programs are part of a broad international assistance effort. The Government of France has indicated its willingness to host an international conference this summer that will provide an opportunity for significant new pledges of international assistance for Afghanistan over the coming years. We are confident that this conference will demonstrate once again the depth of international support for Afghanistan.

## **DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

Our support for democratic stability and constitutional government in Afghanistan is also yielding positive results. The Afghan Parliament is assuming its appropriate role as a deliberative body and Presidential and Parliamentary elections are due in the next two years. Given that voter registration will take about a year to complete, it needs to begin soon. The Afghans will have to make key decisions on election dates and the electoral system. In the Fiscal Year 2008 Supplemental, the President requested \$100 million for critically needed election-support programs.

A transparent and fair justice system is critical to ensuring that the people of Afghanistan respect the authority of the central government and to ensuring that the rights of Afghan citizens are protected. We have established a public-private

partnership with American law firms and schools to help advance rule of law and establish a strong core of legal professionals.

The development of an independent, active Afghan media has been remarkable. However, there is still room for improvement. We are concerned about the deterioration of media freedom over the last year, including an increase in detention of journalists and government interference in media coverage over the past year. Also troubling were the deaths of two female journalists last summer and the recent death sentence of a young Afghan journalist. We are working with the Afghan Government and the Afghan Parliament to emphasize the importance of the new media law currently in the legislative process meeting international standards regarding, in particular, the legal protection of journalists and removing vague content restrictions, establishing a fair, independent licensing system and an independent body to govern Radio Television Afghanistan.

A peaceful and stable Afghanistan cannot be secured without the active political and economic involvement of women. Although women's political participation has gained a degree of acceptance, women who are active in public life continue to face disproportionate threats and violence. Furthermore, women and girls continue to face severe discrimination and both formal and customary justice mechanisms that fail to protect their rights. The United States is firmly committed to support for Afghan women and integrates women's issues into virtually all of its programs, aiming to increase female political participation, education, economic opportunities, and their role in civil society.

## **COUNTERNARCOTICS**

Although the number of poppy-free provinces more than doubled in 2007, total opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan grew significantly. The Afghan Government, the United States, and the international community are alarmed about this development. Afghanistan's poppy production fuels corruption and narcotics addiction, and is a significant source of financing for criminal and insurgent groups. In order to prosper, Afghanistan must rid itself of the opium poppy. President Karzai and his top leaders recognize this.

Countering poppy growth requires a multi-faceted approach. We are pursuing precisely such an approach with our comprehensive five-pillar strategy involving public information, alternative development, law enforcement, interdiction, and eradication: We are reinforcing the message that poppy cultivation is immoral, illegal, and un-Islamic. We are helping farmers gain access

to other means to feed and clothe their families – access to alternative crops and other means of livelihood, to roads that will allow them to move their crops to market, to advice concerning markets for their new crops and to legitimate sources of credit. We are also helping the Afghan Government to increasingly provide credible law enforcement, interdiction, and eradication. The disincentives for poppy cultivation must be bigger than the potential profit. The credibility of our counternarcotics efforts depends upon making the risks of growing poppy unacceptable.

Local governance structures and counternarcotics are closely interconnected. Where government has control and has placed good administrators, poppy production is down. Where the insurgency rages, poppy production is up. This trend is likely to deepen in 2008. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime projects an increase in poppy cultivation in several southern and western provinces and sustained decreases in the East and the North. Overall cultivation is expected to decrease slightly. Given the record cultivation numbers last year, a slight decrease is clearly not satisfactory. We will continue our efforts to counter the narcotics cultivation and trade.

## **RELATIONS WITH PAKISTAN**

A strong, cooperative bilateral relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan is a crucial precondition if we are to see a decline in the cross-border flow of insurgents and progress toward security on both sides of the Durand Line. Afghanistan's relations with Pakistan moved forward in 2007 with several summits, the productive August bilateral peace jirga in Kabul, and President Karzai's successful visit to Islamabad in late December. Both sides agreed at the August peace jirga to hold routine mini-jirgas. Pakistan has offered 1000 scholarships to Afghans in a good step toward increasing positive connections. Despite recent political events in Pakistan, its security forces continue to combat extremism, as demonstrated by their operations to flush out militants in the Swat Valley. Close cooperation with Pakistan remains key to the success of U.S. strategic goals in the region and we continue to explore ways to help the Pakistani military and local security forces improve their counterinsurgency and counterterrorism skills.

We are and have been encouraging the Government of Pakistan to take sustained and aggressive actions against violent extremists. At the same time we recognize that a purely military solution is unlikely to succeed. We therefore strongly support the Government of Pakistan's efforts to implement a

comprehensive and long-term strategy to combat terrorism in the border regions, which include the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, parts of the Northwest Frontier Province, and Baluchistan. We are committed to supporting this initiative to bring economic and social development and effective governance, making these remote areas less hospitable to violent extremists. We are also looking forward to working with Pakistan's new civilian government on this important initiative after the February 18 parliamentary elections.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

In conclusion, let me repeat my earlier observation that in Afghanistan we have had a lot of successes, but we are far from success. We should not lose sight of the progress that has been made and that we continue to make year by year. Broad swaths of Afghanistan -- especially in the North, the West and even the East -- are hardly recognizable by comparison with where they were seven years ago. And we do no-one a service by ignoring this progress.

Nonetheless, there remain daunting challenges -- especially with respect to security, counternarcotics, and governance. And for millions of Afghans, life remains bitterly difficult -- especially during this exceptionally cold winter.

We and our international and Afghan partners have our work cut out for us, but we have a solid foundation of progress on which to build. And I am convinced we have no choice but to meet the remaining challenges head on. With a sustained investment of resources and effort, we have every prospect of securing a stable, democratic and lasting ally in Afghanistan, and an important lynchpin for regional stability and economic integration.

I would be pleased to respond to your questions.

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